The Mercury

and the

Venus aux Colombe.

by

J. B. Pigalle

A short notice
compiled from original documents

Tiffany & Co. New-York
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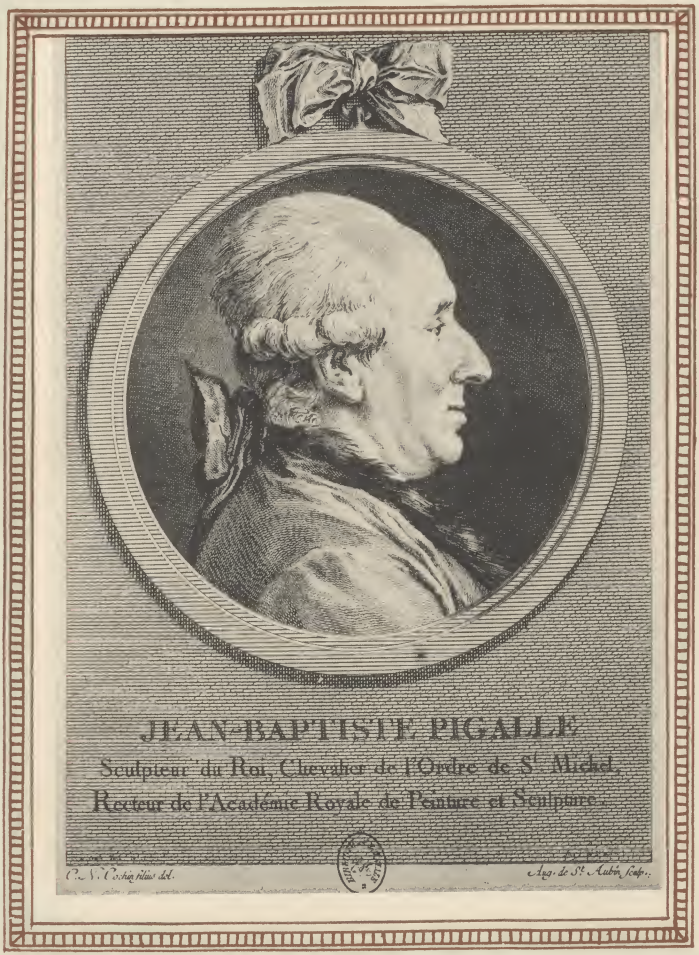
J. B. Pigalle

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MCMVIII



Tiffany & Co

from an original engraving
National Library, Paris

New York

To M^r H. A. Francis
with the compliments of
the autha

C. J. Pigalle

The Mercury
and the
Venus aux Colombes

These two statues are the most celebrated of Pigalle's works, and were the origin of his fame. Their history is curious, and worth being related:

Pigalle, when in Rome

whilst studying and copying from the Antique, conceived the desire of modelling a piece of his own, and after many attempts and researches, arri-ved in modelling in terra cotta, the Statue of Mercury.

On his return voyage from Rome, to Paris, he was detained in Lyons by a dangerous illness, and only saved by the devoted care of his neighbour, a poor

working girl, who exhausted her own small resources in this noble act of Charity.

On his recovery, Pigalle having no money, left the Mercury to this girl as a pledge: "I have no money to give you - said he - but I give you the only treasury I possess, the fruit of my la-bors, take it, it is worth a fortune, and as soon as I can earn enough, I will re-

- deem it - "(1) and although the girl refused to accept, he prepared for his departure.

Unable to judge the artistic value of the Statue, but anxious to help the ar- -tist to the last, She commi- -enced by making a collec- -tion among her neighbours to procure the necessary funds

(1) Carbé - Pigalle. p. 26. - Prosper Carbé is great-grandson of Pigalle; his father was Sébastien Prosper Carbé, who was son of Colombe Catherine Carbé, daughter of Pigalle) -

for his journey to Paris, and among others called on a rich merchant, well known in Lyons as a great connois-seur in Art matters. She put the case before him, stating that the artist, in whose word she had implicit faith had pronounced his Mercury to be a master piece.

To satisfy his curiosity, the merchant went to see the Statue, and was so

much struck with it's rare merits, that he not only reimbursed to the girl all her outlays, but also advanced the necessary funds for Pigalle's journey to Paris all this in the absence of Pigalle and with the understanding that his name would not be mentioned (1)

As soon as Pigalle

(1) Eloge de Pigalle - Molfinot p. 5

arrived in Paris, he hastened to show his Statue to his master Lemoyne, who found no better expression of admi-ration that " My dear friend ! I wish I had made it ! " (1)

The subject is taken from the graceful fable of Cupid and Psyche, which has inspired so many ar-tists .

(1) "Mon ami, je voudrais l'avoir faite" Suard Mélanges de littérature . t. II.

Psyche, victim of the perfidious insinuations of her jealous sisters, has looked at her husband while he was sleeping. Cupid punishes her indiscretion by abandoning her, and she wanders about Earth pursued by the anger of Venus, jealous of her beauty, which, says the legend, was so great, that the Paphos and Cnidian people had abandoned the

Temples of Venus to worship her. (1)

The following is the passage from La Fontaine's immortal poem, which Pigalle endeavoured to render in marble.

a The people sent by a Venus to seize Psyche having

(1) Sacra deae proferuntur ; templa deformantur ; pulvinaria proteruntur : caeremoniae neglguntur incoronata simulacra, et aras viduae frigido cinere fœdatae. Puellae supplicatin, et in humanis miltibus deae tantae numina placantur, et in matutino progressu virginis, victimis et epulis Veneris absentis nomen propriatur.

Apuleii - Metamorphoseon. Liber IV

« failed in their mission, the
« Goddess could think of no
« other means of capturing her
« than to have her "cried out"
« Mercury being the appoi-
« -nted messenger of the Gods
« this being one of his nume-
« -rous attributions, Venus
« seized the opportunity of
« his being in good humour
« and allowing him to
« rob of her of two kisses
« and a pair of earrings,

arranged that he would adver-
" - tise Psyche on all the cross
" - roads of the Universe by
" erecting pillars on which
" a notice should be posted
" reading "..... A fair slave
" " to Venus, called Psyche'
" " who claims being the
" " wife of her son, having
" " escaped, the Goddess
" " promises to give three
" " kisses to any person who
" " will indicate her retreat, and

« even more to whoever
« will deliver her over »

De par la Reine de Cythère,
Soient dans l'un et l'autre hémisphère
Tous humains dûment avertis,
Qu'elle a perdu certaine esclave blonde
Se disant la femme de son fils,
Et qui court à présent le Monde.
Quiconque enseignera sa retraite à Vénus
(Comme c'est chose qui la touche)
Aura trois baisers de la bouche;
Qui la lui livrera, quelque chose de plus! (1)

The Mercury of Pigalle

(1) "Les Amours de Psiche et de Cupidon"
par Mr de La Fontaine" Liv. II f° 289
Paris MDCLXIV.

Note: La Fontaine has in the above nearly copied, word for word, the latin poem of Apulée ... viz " Nec Mercurius

starts to execute the orders of Venus. He is Messenger of the Gods, he is young and handsome, he looks at the Goddess of Love, and smiling as one smiles at the age of

omisit obsequium. Nam per omnium ora populorum passim discurrens, sic mandatae praedicationis munus exsequebatur:

« Si quis a fuga retrahere, vel occultam
« demonstrare poterit fugitivam regis filiam,
« Veneris anetllam, nomine Psychen, convo-
« -niat retro metas Murtias Mercurium
« praedicatorem, accepturus indicinae nomine
« ab ipsa Venere septem savia suavia, et unum
« blandientis appulsu linguae longe mellitum »

(Apuleii - Metamorphoseon - Liber VI.)

twenty, when one is happy of the past, proud of the present, and confident in the future. In his smile there is also a point of mis-chievousness, at the thought of the alluring message he is going to convey to the world. On his head he has already his winged cap and he ties his heel-wings, ready to start.

It was the first creation

of Pigalle, he started by a master piece. —

Encouraged by the opinion of many artists, he exhibited it in his studio. It is said that a stranger after having examined it with the greatest care, said: Never the ancients have done better.' — Pigalle who was listening without being known to him, replied to the ama-

-teur : Have you well studied the Antique ? - Why ! replied with vivacity the connoisseur, - Have you well studied this one. (1)

The original of this Statue was in terra cotta Pigalle executed it in plaster for the Salon of 1742 (2)

Already, on the 4th of November 1741, on the sight

(1) Eloge de Pigalle - Suard - Mélanges. t III
(2) Livret du Salon de 1742 N° 137.

of his terra cotta, Pigalle had been received "Membre Agrée de l'Académie" but he had to execute it in marble for his reception, which took place on the 30th of July 1744. — This original marble is now in the Louvre Museum, in Paris. — (1)

(1) Salle des Coustou, N° 780. —

The Venus aux Colombes

The King Louis XV, having seen the Mercury, was so much pleased with it, that he ordered a copy in marble, to be seven feet high. The lead model of this statue which was so long in the Garden of the Luxembourg, is now in the Louvre, next to the



Vénus aux Colombes

Tiffany & C° Musée du Louvre New York



original marble (Salle des Coustou N° 781) The King gave the order on the condi-tion that" Mr Pigalle "should make a match to a it" -

The Sculptor had not long to hunt for a subject to satisfy the King's wishes. Having represented Mercury preparing to start to exe-cute the orders of Venus, he now made as a match

"Venus giving her orders to Mercury" The original terra cotta of this exquisite Statue, 65 c/m high, is in the Louvre Museum (1) The plaster was exhibited at the Salon of 1742, with the Mercury (2)

The Goddess, is represented all nude. She is seated on

(1) Salle des nouvelles acquisitions (Renaissance)

(2) Livret du Salon de 1742
N° 136. Vn modele en plâtre repréſentant Vénus qui ordonne vn meſſage à Mercure
N° 137. Son pendant : Mercure qui ſe diſpoſe à faire le meſſage qui lui eſt ordonné

a rock, draperies and foliage
cover the rock, which would
be too rough a seat for
Cytherea. Her extended
left arm has the gesture of
command, but with the soft-
-ness and grace in keeping
with the character of the Queen
of Love, and points to the
Earth where Mercury is to
carry his alluring message.
At her feet, are two
symbolic turtle-doves.—

Venus is represented with down cast eyes, the whole of the Statue is so supremely chaste, that it was named at the time "Innocence" this name it sometimes still bears.-

The new Venus was highly praised by Madame de Pompadour - and by the King, who was so much pleased that he ordered reductions to be used as mo-

-dels for the Royal China
Factory of Sevres.

This was about the
time of the war with Holland
At the signature of the
peace at Aix la Chapelle
17th October 1748, Louis XV
wishing to give to his ally
(who had already betrayed
him twice) a present worthy
of the King of France, de-
-cided to present him with
the Mercury and the new Venus

The two Statues were com-
-pleted in 1748 and exhibited
in marble at the Salon of
the same year (1) where
connoisseurs could see them
before their departure for
Germany. This decision of

(1) On account of their size, they could not be transported to the Salon, but were left in Pigalle's studio. They were men-
-tioned as follows on the Catalogue of the Salon of 1748:

« Par M^r Pigalle, Adjoint à Profes-
-seur:

« L'on verra dans son Attelier, Cour
« du Vieux Louvre, les deux Figures en
« marbre de Sept pieds de proportion, l'une

the King's was extremely commen-
-ted on, and criticized by all
that France counted in Artists
and amateurs, and the King
was much blamed for permit-
-ting the departure from France
of such National treasures.-
As regards Pigalle, he saw
with great disappointment
his first and most cherished

(représente Mercure, et l'autre Venus "
a Destinées pour le Roi de Prusse "

Livret du Salon de 1748 - Fo 30 -

conceptions emigrate for foreign lands.—

The Statues were sent at the end of 1749. Frede-rick occupied himself very much of with them, and kept enquiring about them. His correspondant in Paris, Mr de Maupertuis wrote him on the 20th of February 1749 « I have seen in Paris « the two Statues destinated « for you, they are of great

a beauty ; there is a Venus
a and a Mercury attaching
a his wing to his heel that
a has not it's equal in
a the whole world » (1)

On their arrival in Ber-

(1) Je vis, Sire à Paris les statues qui vous sont destinées ; elles sont d'une grande beauté ; il y a une Vénus et un Mercure attachant son aile au talon, qui n'a guère son pareil au monde »

(Vie de Maupertuis - De la Beaumelle. Paris 1856 - p. 415)

-lin, the emotion was great among the artists, every one was wondering how such treasures got to Berlin (1)

Frederick was extremely satisfied with the Statues. On the 17th March 1750, he wrote to the Marquis de Valori, Ambassador of France in Prussia :

« You have seen my

(1) Mathias Oesterreich – Les artistes français à l'Etranger. St Dusseux. P. 1856. P. 93.

admiration and my "sensibi-
-lity" for the fine Statues
that the King your master
has sent me (1)

Frederick placed the
two statues in his park of
Sans Souci, his favourite
residence, at the end of
a terrace, near a large pond

(1) Vous avez vu mon admiration et ma sen-
-sibilité à la réception des belles statues
que le Roi, votre Maître, a bien voulu
m'envoyer » (Mémoires des negociations
du Marquis de Valori - Paris 1820 t. III
p. 308, Lettre LVII.

fed by fountains, with ten other pretty mythological groups and Statues, by the brothers Adam, meles of Clodion[1]

The Mercury and the Venus of Pigalle were the gems of the Royal collection and Frederick (as had been the case with Louis XV,) always

(1) Nicolas Sebastien Adam, born in Nancy 23d March 1705 - died in Paris 27 March 1778 and;

Lambert Sigisbert Adam, born in Nancy 10th February 1700. Died in Paris 13 May 1759.



Mercury attaching his heel Wing.

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Musée du Louvre

New-York



beheld these graceful Statues with the greatest pleasure (1)

In 1776, Pigalle wished to go and see in their definite frame his two "cherished children" as he used to call them, and went to Berlin.

We let one of his contem-poraries tell us the story that occured to him (2)

(1) Lettre de M^r G. Waagen 20 Nov. 1857. Die Museen und Kunstwerke Deutschland - Leipzig 1858 t. I p. 371

(2) Edition des Oeuvres du Roi de Prusse" - see also - Fussli - Dictionnaire des artistes 1829 T II p. 1094. v. Thiébault - p. 24.

As soon as he arrived at the door of the Palace, he was asked for his name; he answered "Mr Pigalle, the author of the Mercury" The King was entertaining that night the Grand Duke of Russia and the Princess of Wurtemberg to whom she was engaged. Pigalle was admitted to the appartments The King had forbidden to let anyone enter the room

in which the dinner was taking place, but the doors were wide open, and Pigalle remained at the door with many other spectators.

The King having recogni-zed in him a stranger, asked who he was, and was told, according to the infor-mation taken at the door that he was "... the author of the Mercury" The King taking him to be the editor

of the "Mercure de France"
a then famous newspaper of
which he had to complain,
refused to receive him and
took no further notice of him.

Pigalle mortified left
immediately Berlin. The
King having learnt the fol-
-lowing day the misunder-
-standing, immediately sent
for Pigalle, but he had left
for Dresden. The King then sent
him a special messenger l'Abbé

Pernotti to express his regret, a fact which honors the King as well as the artist (1)

The King did never neglect since any occasion to prove his appreciation for Pigalle, which he had so badly received and in many occasions did publicly praise him.

(1) Letter of M^r Waagen 20^th November 1857

(2) Edition des Oeuvres du Roi de Prusse Berlin 1847. T VII p. 35, T XIII p. 166 T. XXIV p.p. 192 - 491.

The Venus, after ha-
-ving adorned the gardens
of Sans Souci for nearly
one century and a half,
is now in the Frederick
Museum in Berlin. It
was lent by the German
Emperor for the Paris Ex-
-hibition of 1900, where it
was exhibited in the official
Pavillion of Germany.

It is one of the most
exquisite conceptions of

Pigalle, a work of his youth
into which he had put all
the passion of his early years
It is true the figure
does not possess the lofty
air that one could expect
of a Goddess, it is not even
a woman of Spaita or
of Rome, but simply a
French woman in her
National beauty, such as
Pigalle used to see around
him, and one feels, specially

when examining the Louvre original Terra cotta that under the pretext of a mytho-logical scene, he wanted to incarnate in imperishable ma-terial, the graces and the charm of the woman of his epoch. and the quintessence of the delicate refinement and grace of the eighteenth Cen-tury.

J. G.
1908

1749

Presenté à Monsieur le Directeur général
Reglé à 24000 ll. et payé en entier le 28 8bre 1749

payé en entier
8bre 1749
24000 ll

Memoire des Ouvrages de Sculpture faits pour le Roy, suivant les Ordres de Monsieur De Tournehem, Directeur et Ordonnateur General des Batimens de Sa Majesté, par Pigale, Sculpteur en son Academie.

Casin

Deux figures en marbre de 7. pieds de proportion:

L'une represente Venus qui donne un message à Mercure pour lad. figure la somme de —

L'autre represente Mercure qui attache ses talonnieres pour lad. figure la somme de —

Plus un Vase aussi en marbre de 6. pieds de haut très richement orné de deux têtes de Bacchantes de grappes de raisin naturelles, de deux têtes de

Original accounts respecting the M

Tome

Archives

Aud.r Pigalle.

Payements

Ex. de 1749.

COPIE FRANÇAISE DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE DES ARCHIVES

Un Memoire contenant trois morceaux de Sculpture en marbre: Savoir

1.° Mercure	10000.
2.° Venus	10000
3.° Un Vase	4000.
	24000.

1748 et 1749	10000.
1748 29 Jan.	2000.
1748. 19. fev	3000.
1748. 29. Sept.	1200.
1749. 6 fev	2000.
1749. 23 mai	3000.
1749. 17 Juillet	2000.
1749. 28 Sept.	800.
Total	24000

ercury and the Venus by Pigalle

Nationales)

N.y.x



La Vénus de Berlin

Tiffany & Cº (Frederick Museum, Berlin.) New-York



Note
respecting the
Venus of Pigalle
in the Museum of Berlin

Pigalle, in executing in marble the Venus for the King of Prussia, made several alterations to his original Terra Cotta

model, which we think we would signal to our readers.

The pose of the Paris Venus is full of delicate grace and ease, her right arm stretched and rested on the rock seems to uphold her graceful body in a somewhat supple and undulated position, while her left arm has a gesture so soft and so timid, that it can be interpreted more as a wish than as an order, and her eyes are chastily cast down.—

In the Berlin marble, the position of the body, although

remaining exquisitely gracious is slightly more decided; it is with the right hand that the noir gives the order to carry the message to the world, while her eyes regard Mercury more fully.

Although we profess the same profound admiration for the plastic beauty and sentiment of these two statues, equally beautiful and exquisite, we must admit that the original terra cotta has our preference, because it evidently is the first inspiration

of the Master, and his first conception of his ideal of national beauty, with it's inherent softness in keeping with the artist's nature and style.

We can imagine him before his model, noting the beauty of form and womanly grace full of life and sentiment It is not a Goddess he had before him, but simply a woman; a woman full of delicate charm and movement, and who, at moments, forgetting her role allowed her body to be, what it really is, the personification

of grace and voluptuousness.—

Although admiring and praising highly the Venus of Berlin, we can safely say that we prefer the Paris one, and we are not alone in this preference, for it is to be remarked that the Paris model is the only one which has ever been re-produced, even in Germany.

G. P.